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Rizescu, Victor

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CURENTE ȘI IDEI POLITICE

THE NATION OF THE WESTERNIZERS: MAINSTREAM AND MINORITY VARIETIES OF ROMANIAN LIBERALISM

VICTOR RIZESCU*

Between 1900 and 1940, westernizer liberalism embraced, in Romania, three ideological formulations clearly distinguishable from each other. They can be discovered as crisscrossing in the pages of three periodicals. Published over the year 1923, from January to November – and significantly focused on debating the preparation and reverberations of the constitutional revision adopted in the same year, in March –, the journal “Dreptatea socială” was underlined by a “liberal socialist” vision that sociologist Dumitru Drăghicescu (acting as a director) offered as an elaboration of his broader social philosophy shaped at the interplay between the European social-democratic tradition and his core Durkheimian ideas. This view is much too easy to be mistaken for the one that it (strangely) cohabitates with in the pages of the same journal: the argumentation in favor of enhancing the interventionist cast of the local mainstream liberalism advanced by Ștefan Zeletin, in conjunction with his open acknowledgement of the oligarchic and bureaucratic nature of the policies customarily employed by the National Liberal Party as a privileged driving force of modernizing social change.

Between January 1933 and December 1937 – and decreasingly so over the following years, up to December 1940 –, the journal “Libertatea economică, politică, socială, culturală” (headed by economist George Strat as a chief-editor and by industrialist Ion Gigurtu as a director) advanced a vision of free trade liberalism in stark opposition to the same mainstream and deeply entrenched interventionist wisdom in the course of being strengthened by the rising authoritarian ideologies of the Left and the Right. The few statements that Drăghicescu gave here spelled out his disagreements with the unqualified individualist philosophy of the journal, nevertheless maintaining a line markedly different from the Zeletinian one.

In its turn, “Libertatea”’s stance – prodigiously served by journalist Ștefan Antim (with a legal training) and occasionally also by the elder H. Sanielevici (an influential, although always marginalized figure of literary criticism as well as of broader topics of journalistic interest) – was anticipated by that of another periodical: “Curentul nou,” with Sanielevici as a director and issued first in 1905–1906, and then again in 1920 (this second time with Antim as a main collaborator). Expressions of the standard view calling for a statist-based adjustment of the liberal

* University of Bucharest, Faculty of Political Sciences; v_rizescu@yahoo.com.

ideas sometimes featured in the last journal, in cohabitation with its growing intimation of the need for a return to classical liberalism. The three Romanian interpretations of liberalism are considered in the following, by having recourse to comparative references over the long run of history.

1.

The doctrine of liberal socialism is consistently elaborated, in the pages of “Dreptatea socială,” by Drăghicescu alone, in continuation to his political tracts of the previous two years.¹ The opening article entitled *What do we want?* (unsigned, but undeniably his) thus advocates a program meant to strike and broaden a wise middle road between liberalism and socialism, stating that “in order not to degenerate into abusive practices, into fraud and unchecked competition, the principle of liberty has to function only in conjunction with that of justice, in the same way as justice itself can go along without liberty, as the socialists want, only at the cost of relapsing into the most odious tyranny.”² This statement can only be made after acknowledging that a significant part of the socialist view has established itself as the horizon of any meaningful policy of social reform, to the extent that “the socialist movement shows itself, nowadays, as impetuous as the liberal one was in 1848, and its chances to succeed seem to be also much the same.”³ Hence, “the principle of social justice” promoted by the new periodical must not be perceived as a challenging minority opinion, but as “underlying the aspirations of the entire Romanian politics.” The publishing enterprise inaugurated can only have the function to act as a vehicle for bringing to full light such diffuse ideals and unclear expectations, thus “defining and clarifying the principle in question and scrutinizing its many practical implications.”⁴

While thus making plain its closeness to socialist politics, the new doctrine nevertheless underscores its pacifist edge. It is meant to lessen social tensions and class warfare, in the same way as it is dedicated to preventing war “between peoples and states.” Indeed, “while customary political activity inflames the state of conflict as to transform it into social warfare, the morality of social justice requires that conflicts are prevented by the means of arbitration.”⁵ This task can only be approached by reworking the notion of “property,” which stays at the very core of the liberal socialist endeavors: “Because the issue of property stays as the very foundation and regulatory principle of the relations between classes, it is only

¹ D. Drăghicescu, *Evoluția ideilor liberale*, Bucharest, 1921; idem, *Partide politice și clase sociale*, Bucharest, 1922.

² *Ce voim?*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 15 January 1923, no. 1, p. 5.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁵ D. Drăghicescu, *Dreptate și dreptate socială*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 15 January 1923, no. 1, p. 10.

natural that we start by focusing on its understandings. The way property is acquired, used and transmitted must be the first object of our inquiries.”⁶ In their turn, such inquiries can only start from acknowledging that the redefinition of property is currently underway, due to the inescapable process by which economic production is gradually socialized: “Industrial property is already collectivized and socialized. This is because the form of the shareholding company adopted, especially after the war, by most of industrial and commercial enterprises, is in fact a collective or social form of property.”⁷

Having said this, however, a genuine vision of social justice must act such as to prevent the development of this process of socialization into the full nationalization of economic life envisioned by Marxist socialism: “Property of whatever kind has to be warranted, because its existence is a requirement for social peace.”⁸ Recent historical experience has “disavowed socialist theories, showing how wrong their expectations of forced socialization, by the expropriation of the expropriators, actually were.”⁹ It has also shed a revealing light on the “incapacity of the bureaucratic state to act efficiently in the economic field, together with its ingrained tendency to shift the deficits incurred by state-managed enterprises on the shoulders of the tax payers.”¹⁰ It is on these grounds that “liberal socialism [...] must militate for an association between individual and state interests, within state-controlled enterprises. [...] Liberal socialism rules out the tyranny of state management, which, besides oppressing the individual and individual initiative, leads to stagnation or even decline.”¹¹ Accordingly, “the objectives of socialization and nationalization must be approached gradually, by taking account of the types of enterprises and of the various factors of production involved.”¹² They can most appropriately be attained in the framework of the “autonomous socialized enterprises,” conceived by Drăghicescu to allow for the employees to act as co-proprietors and co-administrators, together with the state¹³ (provided that the state itself abandons its bureaucratic, centralized and militarized character, in so far as, when adopting an “economic function,” it will have to “create an organization

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁷ Idem, *Noțiunea proprietății și formele ei*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 15 February 1923, no. 3, p. 70.

⁸ Idem, *Dreptul de proprietate și pacea socială*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 1 March 1923, no. 4, p. 109.

⁹ Idem, *Proprietatea și marile întreprinderi. Societățile anonime*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 1 April 1923, no. 6, p. 168.

¹⁰ Idem, *Regimul proprietății și întreprinderile mari. Socializarea și regia de stat*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 1 March 1923, no. 4, p. 202.

¹¹ Idem, *Burghezia și socialismul liberal*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 15 February 1923, no. 3, p. 95.

¹² Idem, *Regimul proprietății și întreprinderile mari*, p. 200.

¹³ Idem, *Naționalizarea întreprinderilor mari. Regia socială independentă*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 15 May 1923, no. 9, pp. 266–274.

suited to its new role”¹⁴). It is only by such doing that the task of reworking the bases of property as to place them in accordance with the requirements of social justice can be accomplished: “By [...] various policies, including progressive taxation, nationalization, expropriation and confiscations, the fortunes amassed in great quantities by whatever means [...] will be lowered down to levels legitimate from the standpoint of social equity. It is only in this way that right and rational relations between capitals and the demands of social justice can be obtained. In other words, it is only under these conditions that the contradiction between capital and the principle of justice can be solved.”¹⁵

Drăghicescu’s perception of the core socialist program as tacitly subscribed to, at the beginning of the 1920’s, by virtually all the segments of Romanian political and ideological life emerges retrospectively as starkly incongruent with the realities of a chronically marginal and electorally insignificant social-democratic movement,¹⁶ of a communist trend rapidly wiped out as a factor of political significance – in another way than in the guise of a small clandestine group¹⁷ – and of a peasantist current always vacillating over its vision of class conflict as it related to the peculiar class structure of the country.¹⁸ Although the calls for social pacification and harmonization professed by “Dreptatea socială” were, otherwise, very common in the local cultural and ideological milieu,¹⁹ the doctrine of liberal socialism had overtones hard to be discovered as part of other – and more influential – ideological traditions.

Its counterparts in other European countries are easy to identify, however. Most closely reminiscent of it was definitely the view developed under the same ideological label in Italy by Carlo Rosselli, emerging to the same extent as that of Drăghicescu as a result of a gradual disentanglement from social-democracy by a way back to liberal rule of law principles (and eventually used by the same political thinker as a support for his opposition to fascism).²⁰ Of still greater significance was the entire welter of ideas pointing to a broadening of liberalism towards embracing

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 267.

¹⁵ Idem, *Proprietatea (capitalul) și dreptatea socială. Cum se câștigă averile?*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 1–15 July 1923, nos. 12–13, pp. 367–368.

¹⁶ Henry L. Roberts, *Rumania. Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, Hamden, Conn., 1969 [1951], pp. 243–258.

¹⁷ Lucien Karchmar, *Communism in Romania, 1918–1921*, in *The Effects of World War I. The Class War after the Great War: The Rise of Communist Parties in East Central Europe 1918–1921*, ed. by Ivo Banac, Boulder, Colo., 1983, pp. 127–187.

¹⁸ Z. Ornea, *Țărănismul. Studiu sociologic*, Bucharest, 1969; George D. Jackson, *Peasant Political Movements in Eastern Europe*, in *Rural Protest: Peasant Movements and Social Change*, ed. by Henry A. Landsberger, London, 1974, pp. 259–315.

¹⁹ See, for example, Z. Ornea, *Sămănătorismul*, Bucharest, 1998 [1970], pp. 134–140; Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Concepția conservatoare și progresul*, in *Doctrinile partidelor politice*, ed. by Petre Dan, Bucharest, n.d. [1996 (1923)], pp. 64–90.

²⁰ Stanislao G. Pugliese, *Carlo Rosselli: Socialist Heretic and Anti-Fascist Exile*, Cambridge, Mass., 1999.

social concerns, originated already in the last decades of the nineteenth century and establishing itself as dominant within the liberal camp during the opening decades of the twentieth. Shaped at the interplay between political theory and sociological inquiry – and accordingly elaborated by the means of a sustained dialogue between political philosophers and the representatives of the discipline of sociology, in the course of being entrenched as a separate academic compartment²¹ – the “new liberalism” drew on various philosophical premises, stretching from positivism, through neo-Kantianism and neo-Hegelianism, to Orthodox Christianity. In Italy itself, Rosselli’s concerns were shared by theorists as different as the elite sociologist Vilfredo Pareto and the neo-Hegelian philosopher (and idealist historian) Benedetto Croce,²² that formed part of a cross-European intellectual movement. Best represented in Britain – where it was developed by T.H. Green, J.A. Hobson and L.T. Hobhouse, in continuation to the radical thrust of John Stuart Mill’s thinking,²³ the same enterprise of ideological refashioning could resonate, in France, with the local republican tradition, broadened on neo-Kantian bases by Charles Renouvier and translated into the idiom of “solidarism” by Léon Bourgeois.²⁴ The politics of Durkheim, issuing from its sociological understanding of the disruptive and atomizing effects that modernization had on the social bounds, belonged to the same company,²⁵ to the same extent that, in Germany, Max Weber’s sociological conception was intimately connected with his urge for the adaptation of liberal constitutionalist practices to the requirements of heavy bureaucratization and accomplished rationalization prevalent in modern society.²⁶ In Russia, a “new liberal” trend of thought, emerging, with Vladimir Soloviev, from within the Slavophile tradition, turned to adopting neo-Kantian premises and evolved towards a liberal socialist stance in the works of Leon Petrażycki, Pavel Novgorodtsev and Bogdan Kistiakovsky, in order to move afterwards to the position of “rule of law socialism” with Sergius Hessen.²⁷

Five of the articles contributed by Ștefan Zeletin to “Dreptatea socială” were retained by him in the volume *Neoliberalism* of 1927,²⁸ and it is undeniable that they

²¹ Anthony Giddens, *Classical Social Theory and the Origins of Modern Sociology*, in “The American Journal of Sociology,” 81, 1976, no. 4, pp. 703–729. See also H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890–1930*, New York, 1976 [1958].

²² Richard Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society. A Historical Argument*, University Park, Penns., 1992, pp. 121–156.

²³ Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism. An Ideology of Social Reform*, Oxford, 1978; R. Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society*, pp. 9–57.

²⁴ R. Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society*, pp. 58–74; Michael Freeden, *The Coming of the Welfare State*, in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, ed. by Terence Ball, Richard Bellamy, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 30–35.

²⁵ R. Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society*, pp. 74–104.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 165–216.

²⁷ Andrzej Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*, Notre Dame, Ind., 1992 [1987], pp. 165–465.

²⁸ Ștefan Zeletin, *Pseudoburghezie, Finanță și antisemitism, Forță și constituție, Politica muncii, Naționalismul. Un nume pentru două atitudini opuse față de evoluția socială*, all in *Neoliberalismul. Studii asupra istoriei și politicii burgheziei române*, ed. by C.D. Zeletin, Bucharest, 1992 [1927].

have to be seen as an integral part of his sophisticated refashioning of the Romanian tradition of economic protectionism, thus transformed into a wide-ranging political rationalization of oligarchic modernizing liberalism with a strong nationalist commitment (best embodied historically by the National Liberal Party but envisioned by him to get an even better incarnation in the People's Party). Although occasionally paying homage, conveniently, to the master-discourse of the journal – as for example when designating it as “‘neoliberalism’ or ‘liberal socialism’,”²⁹ Zeletin nevertheless proceeds undisturbed with an argumentation strikingly, but undeniably at odds with that advanced by the director of the publication. Stretching through it is the vision that – even when proven as a spoliator of the whole society by the standards of usual morality³⁰ – the reigning financial oligarchy – denounced as such from all corners of the public opinion and emerged from within the bureaucratic class ruling over Romanian society over the preceding period, up to the immediate aftermath of the First World War³¹ – has to be accepted as a most necessary evil and a benefactor to the national interests over the long run. When enriching itself, even at the cost of employing state levers to serve its own narrow interests, the plutocracy works for the betterment of the whole society. This is because, “as long as the class division of society prevails, national prosperity hinges on the prosperity of the ruling class and national ruin comes from the ruin of that same class.”³²

Advancing this idea in order to face the criticisms leveled by the left-wing newspaper “Adevărul” against the project of constitutional revision engineered by the National Liberal Party, Zeletin discovers the oligarchic behavior – usually blamed on that political force in a privileged fashion – as a pervasive temptation arising from deep social demands, to which opposition parties very easily succumb: “Economic evolution in modern Romania has inescapably led to the strengthening of the financial oligarchy, and our entire politics is predicated on this reality. Our self-styled democratic parties, that claim to fight against the oligarchy, tend to become themselves parts of the same financial oligarchy. Indeed, this is just the natural consequence of our entire social evolution.”³³ Playing, as usually, on his ingenious comparisons between (delayed) Romanian and (pioneering) western stages of evolution and social forms, Zeletin manages to legitimize the intermingling – through blatant corruption practices – between bourgeois financial greed and state power as part and parcel of the record of social and economic development, reminiscent of the alliance between the nascent bourgeoisie and

²⁹ Idem, *Liberalism, neoliberalism și socialism de stat*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 1 May 1923, no. 8, p. 235.

³⁰ Idem, “Acumularea primitivă” în România [1922], in *Neoliberalismul*, ed. by C.D. Zeletin, pp. 135–141.

³¹ Idem, *Burghezia română. Originea și rolul ei istoric*, ed. by C.D. Zeletin, Bucharest, 1991 [1925], pp. 163–194.

³² Idem, *Finanța națională și politica de stat (Răspuns profesiei de credință a ziarului “Adevărul”)*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 15 April 1923, no. 7, p. 216.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 218.

absolutist monarchies in the old regime societies of the West: “As nowadays we live under a democratic parliamentary regime, capitalism cannot confine itself to obtain on its behalf the favors of the monarch alone, as it used to do in the past. It must have its voice heard in the democratic factory of legislation as well. It is to this extent that the most prominent political figures are driven into the administration bodies of the economic enterprises. We can encounter there, for sure, former ministers and prime ministers of great public influence, whose word is an order for a large parliamentary gallery. They are, as already said, the political agents of the financial bourgeoisie: they have to obtain all the legal provisions needed to further the pursuit of capitalist interests.”³⁴ Just several days before the adoption of the constitutional revision in the parliament by a substantial Liberal Party majority and in the midst of a sustained public contestation of the same piece of legislation, Zeletin is eager to depict the constitutional document itself as the result of such bargaining between the political class and its economic counterpart: “It is undeniable that the actual constitutional project is fashioned on the basis of financial capitalist interests. But our countrymen refuse to accept this idea. How is it possible, they say, that a handful of people – or an oligarchy – rule over the country in a quasi-absolutist manner, imposing on it even the fundamental law? We can only answer that this is not only possible, but even natural. In such historic moments, when all the other classes fall into darkness, allowing only one of them to act effectively, the interests of this last class are one and the same with those of the nation as a whole, and its aspirations are undistinguishable from those of the entire nation.”³⁵

Although sometimes pointing to financial cartels as possible coordinating agencies for his envisioned design – otherwise marked by deep decentralization – intent on broadening the scope of social justice by the means of a combination between state management and individual economic initiative,³⁶ Drăghicescu has as his main objective the entrenchment of welfare policies in conjunction with greater democratization (as a stark advocate for universal suffrage, he conceives of it in a developmentalist way, as a vehicle for the maturation of social conscience³⁷). Zeletin, instead, spares no time to present low-class suffering as a requirement for national consolidation, which can only be obtained by compliance with the oligarchic leadership of modernizing change. While the former thinker speaks as a disappointed socialist who came to appreciate at full value the relevance of individual freedom,³⁸ the latter makes the case for enhanced authoritarianism,

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 213.

³⁵ *Idem*, *Forță și constituție*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 15 March 1923, no. 5, p. 137.

³⁶ D. Drăghicescu, *Finanța și coordonarea marilor întreprinderi (creditul industrial)*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, 1 June 1923, no. 10, pp. 296–301.

³⁷ *Idem*, *Reforma electorală. Discurs rostit la Senat în ședința de la 15 decembrie 1925*, Bucharest, 1926. Compare, for example, G. Panu, *Sufragiul universal*, Bucharest, 1893.

³⁸ D. Drăghicescu, *Idealul creator. Eșeu psiho-sociologic asupra evoluției sociale*, ed. by Virgiliu Constantinescu-Galiceni, Bucharest, 2005 [1914].

semi-parliamentarianism and openly displayed economic interventionism with an oligarchic cast only to offer, as a compensation, his reassuring prospect that a form of mild socialism imposed top-down, without any recourse to revolutionary upheavals, stays as the inescapable fate of the entire capitalist world of which Romania is a part.³⁹ The difference is stark and undeniable.

Articles 17–21 of the constitutional document adopted in March provided for an understanding of property as based on the notion of “social utility,”⁴⁰ and there has always been a tendency to briefly mention Zeletin and Drăghicescu as parts of a “neoliberal” quasi-consensus making for this result.⁴¹ The interwar constitution was harshly criticized on account of its loopholes allowing for further authoritarian evolutions.⁴² It is hard to look at Drăghicescu as to an inspiration for such political faults of the 1920’s and the 1930’s. The responsibilities in the field of Zeletin can only receive a different assessment.

2.

Mainstream Romanian liberalism could be classified as a peripheral variety – with a corresponding focus on bureaucratic interests – of the late nineteenth century “sectarian liberalism,” functioning as a narrow minded ideology of the (upper) bourgeoisie, after basic liberal values had been institutionally and socially entrenched, coming to be adopted quasi-consensually by all parts of the political spectrum.⁴³ The incongruence between the pleading for Manchesterian-style free trade principles advanced by this dominant liberal discourse and the blatant realities of a growing monopolist economy increasingly controlled by banking cartels and indebted to state-driven policies of imperialist expansion contributed heavily to the rise of the socially-minded – and basically left-wing – “new liberal” view, by way of reaction.⁴⁴ To the same extent, Zeletin’s expectation of oligarchic-induced socialism – argued primarily by reference to the dissident socialist conception of Werner Sombart and to Rudolf Hilferding’s Austro-Marxist analysis of finance capitalism – strongly recalls the main tenets of the German “socialism of the chair” (connected with the same “sectarian” bourgeois interests) and of the Russian “legal Marxist” school⁴⁵ (that yielded, in the case of its most conspicuous

³⁹ Ștefan Zeletin, *Neoliberalismul* [1926], in *Neoliberalismul*, ed. by C.D. Zeletin, pp. 83–100.

⁴⁰ See the collective volume *Constituția din 1923 în dezbaterile contemporanilor*, Bucharest, 1990 [*Noua constituție a României*, 1923], pp. 613–614.

⁴¹ M. Rusenescu, I. Saizu, *Viața politică în România, 1922–1928*, Bucharest, 1979, pp. 27–29; Mircea Mușat, Ion Ardeleanu, *România după Marea Unire*, vol. 1, 1918–1933, Bucharest, 1986, pp. 55–70.

⁴² H.L. Roberts, *Rumania*, pp. 97–99.

⁴³ Victoria F. Brown, *The Adaptation of a Western Political Theory in a Peripheral State: The Case of Romanian Liberalism*, in *Romania between East and West*, ed. by Stephen Fischer-Galati *et al.*, Boulder, Colo., 1982, pp. 269–301.

⁴⁴ R. Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society*, pp. 3–4.

⁴⁵ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, New York, Norton, 2005 [1978], pp. 435, 646–655.

representative, Peter Struve, to a political redefinition leading him from social-democracy, through left-wing liberalism, to a liberal conservative position⁴⁶).

Beyond such particular connections, the type of liberal practices ideologically reinforced by Zeletin was a general rule all throughout the (sub)regions of Eastern, (Est-)Central and South-Eastern Europe, no matter whether modernizing policies strongly committed to nation-building and accelerated social change acted under a liberal banner or otherwise.⁴⁷ Liberal discourse itself was most instrumental to propel policies of modernization of the sort over the long run in such countries as Greece,⁴⁸ Hungary⁴⁹ or Romania.⁵⁰ It also acted as an original impulse for the same kind of policies in Serbia and Bulgaria, where it lost ground, later on, to other discourses eager to emphasize their more left-wing radical-democratic and (partly) socialist credentials only to take over and strengthen the oligarchic practices they criticized.⁵¹ Having to postpone indefinitely any flirtation with liberal parliamentarianism, Russian autocracy nevertheless participated in the same historical trend as a “well-ordered police state.”⁵² The oppositional liberalism developed here was itself propelled on a path of de-radicalization,⁵³ the same predicament being shared by its Polish counterpart.⁵⁴ From Germany⁵⁵ to Japan,⁵⁶

⁴⁶ Richard Pipes, *Struve, Liberal on the Left, 1870–1905*, Cambridge, Mass., 1970; idem, *Struve, Liberal on the Right, 1905–1944*, Cambridge, Mass., 1980.

⁴⁷ Robin Okey, *Eastern Europe 1740–1985: Feudalism to Communism*, 2nd ed., London, 1989; Andrew C. Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World. The Politics of the Borderlands from Pre- to Postcommunism*, Stanford, 2000.

⁴⁸ Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *The Enlightenment East and West: A Comparative Perspective on the Ideological Origins of the Balkan Political Traditions*, in *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy. Studies in the Culture and Political Thought of South-Eastern Europe*, Aldershot, 1994, pp. 51–70; Ioannis Tassopoulos, *The Experiment of Inclusive Constitutionalism, 1909–1932*, in *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship*, ed. by Paschalis M. Kitromilides, Edinburgh, 2006, pp. 251–272.

⁴⁹ Andrew C. Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary*, Princeton, 1982.

⁵⁰ Idem, *Modernization and Decay in Historical Perspective: The Case of Romania*, in *Social Change in Romania, 1860–1940. A Debate on Development in a European Nation*, ed. by Kenneth Jowitt, Berkeley, 1978, pp. 72–116.

⁵¹ Richard J. Crampton, *Bulgaria, 1878–1918. A History*, Boulder, Colo., 1983; Gale Stokes, *Politics as Development. The Emergence of Political Parties in Nineteenth-Century Serbia*, Durham, 1990.

⁵² Marc Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State and the Development of Modernity in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Europe: An Attempt at a Comparative Approach*, in “The American Historical Review,” 80, 1975, no. 5, pp. 1221–1243.

⁵³ George Fischer, *Russian Liberalism: From Gentry to Intelligentsia*, Cambridge, Mass., 1958; Andrzej Walicki, *Russian Social Thought: An Introduction to the Intellectual History of Nineteenth Century Russia*, in “Russian Review,” 36, 1977, no. 1, pp. 1–45.

⁵⁴ Brian A. Porter, *Democracy and Discipline in Late Nineteenth-Century Poland*, in “The Journal of Modern History,” 71, 1999, no. 2, pp. 346–393; Maciej Janowski, *Polish Liberal Thought before 1918*, Budapest, 2004, pp. 147–218.

⁵⁵ James J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century*, Chicago, 1978; Dieter Langewiesche, *Liberalism in Germany*, Princeton, 2000.

⁵⁶ Douglas Howland, *Translating Liberty in Nineteenth-Century Japan*, in “Journal of the History of Ideas,” 62, 2001, no. 1, pp. 161–189.

the surge to freedom was calibrated – and partially falsified – in order to meet the demands of (relative) backwardness.

It is against the background of the reigning statist modernizing liberalism and of the prevalent Zeletinist tradition that one can understand the full originality of the stance adopted, from its first issue, by the journal “*Libertatea*.” The opening article rejects communism and fascism in conjunction with a diffuse interventionist wisdom which sustains a widespread skepticism towards the ideas of economic and political freedom: “At present, the public is invited to subscribe, in turn, to the otherwise most opposite doctrines, from medieval-style corporatism to Asiatic bolshevism, not to forget fascist corporatism, statist economy and other interventionist utopias, at the cost of abandoning completely economic and political liberty. They are not only seen as outdated but are even held responsible for the terrible crisis the entire world is facing.”⁵⁷ Chief-editor George Strat understands the drive away from classical liberalism as paving the road to dictatorial serfdom: “Statist and interventionist practices must be eliminated without hesitation, as it is through them that, without notice, society is set on the road to socialism and dictatorship.”⁵⁸ A peculiar – and primitive – social psychology is found at the roots of the interventionist disease, to the same extent as liberalism is depicted as the underlying psychology of genuine modern social life: “To the mechanistic conception, which stays at the basis of any system of statist economy and which can only suit the barbaric and destructive mind, civilized world has to oppose the conception of an organic economy, that, for the time being, cannot be given a better name than liberalism.”⁵⁹

Although contributing all throughout primarily with pragmatic commentaries on internal and foreign politics and on domestic and international economic developments, and never eulogizing individualistic values in the same fashion as the other collaborators, I.P. Gigurtu, the funder and director of the publishing enterprise, nevertheless tackles from the beginning the delicate issue of the relation between politics and economics,⁶⁰ in order to make clear afterwards – however occasionally – his dissatisfaction with the statist perversion of capitalism, found by him as strongly connected with the spread of an anti-capitalist opinion. The bourgeois class itself is guilty of this, in so far as, facing the disruptions brought by the economic crisis, its members “joined forces with the interventionist state policies.” This is because “they liked to see the state first covering a part of their losses, and then granting them large benefits at the cost of falsifying the capitalist regime, based on free competition. It is because of such policies that a negative stance towards capitalists gained ground. Later, this stance was extended to the capitalist system itself, the two notions being easily mistaken for each other.”⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Cuvânt înainte*, in “*Libertatea*,” 1, 5 January 1933, no. 1, p. 3.

⁵⁸ G. Strat, *Viitorul capitalismului*, in “*Libertatea*,” 1, 20 June 1933, no. 12, p. 179.

⁵⁹ I. Constanțiu, *Psihologia economiei dirijate*, in “*Libertatea*,” 3, 5–20 July 1935, nos. 13–14, p. 204.

⁶⁰ I.P. Gigurtu, *Politicul și economicul*, in “*Libertatea*,” 1, 5 January 1933, no. 1, p. 5–6.

⁶¹ Idem, *Capitalismul și capitaliștii*, in “*Libertatea*,” 3, 5–20 July 1935, nos. 13–14, pp. 194–195.

No matter how pathetic “Libertatea”’s defense of liberalism against both internal and international enemies might have looked like over its first five years – inaugurated at the very moment of the Nazi seizure of power in Germany, in January 1933, and followed by three years of increasing concessions and growing accommodation to domestic authoritarianism, from the beginning of 1938 to the end of 1940 –, the attempt of Dumitru Drăghicescu to vindicate, against the classical liberal comeback promoted by Strat and his associates, a rightly balanced ratio between the demands of individual freedom and the need of containing the damaging effects of unqualified economic individualism sounds even more impressive in the circumstances. Arguing in the footsteps of an exchange between Strat and peasantist Mihai Ralea⁶² – the latter criticizing the stance of “Libertatea,” from a sociological standpoint, in the journal “Viața românească” –, Drăghicescu tries, once again, to cut a middle way between socialist temptations and bare liberal capitalism. Briefly recalling the changing fortunes of the combat between free trade economy and statist policies on the European scene, he explains that Manchesterian liberalism led to the monopolistic falsification of free enterprise, and state interventionist policies were then required precisely in order to protect individualistic values: “Excessive individualism provoked the reaction of the social principle, that manifested itself in the guise of monopolist practices, harnessed to the service of either particular persons or of associations. It is in this way that liberalism worked for its own annihilation, leading to the creation of medium and large enterprises which, by taking advantage of propitious situations, grew into gigantic shareholder companies. Under their influence, individualism was eventually socialized, being regimented into syndicates and cartels. [...] Interventionism was then called upon precisely as an instrument for the protection of the individual freedom and of free enterprise, its task being that of ruling out or at least lessening the monopolistic pressures placed upon them. It was in this way that the social principle acted to the very benefit of individualism.”⁶³

While Strat established a connection between insidious interventionist prejudices and thriving political tyranny in a way strongly reminiscent of the arguments later advanced by Friedrich Hayek regarding the socialist temptations as a springboard for totalitarianism,⁶⁴ Drăghicescu’s understanding of the perverse effects of nineteenth century Manchesterian economy can be claimed on behalf of Karl Polanyi’s opposite view (delivered at the same time as Hayek’s), which traced back interwar political authoritarianism to the long-term effects of unhindered economic individualism.⁶⁵ This Romanian anticipation of a classical disagreement on the causal

⁶² G. Strat, *Răspuns d-lui Ralea*, in “Libertatea,” 1, 5 May 1933, no. 9, pp. 132–133.

⁶³ D. Drăghicescu, *Determinismul social și valoarea inițiativei individuale*, in “Libertatea,” 1, June 1933, no. 11, pp. 161–163.

⁶⁴ Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, Chicago, 1994 [1944].

⁶⁵ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Boston, 2001 [1944].

connection between economics and politics was not broadened in “Libertatea.” When restating his case⁶⁶ – in continuation to his long-standing reflections, informed by Durkheimian theorizing, on the relation between individual “agency” and the constraints of social “structure” in human developments, in order to ponder the scope of determinism as part of a right approach to the intricacies of social life⁶⁷ –, Drăghicescu provoked a brief rejoinder of Strat,⁶⁸ which, on all accounts, abruptly closed the debate. Even unaccomplished, the discussion in question can still display fresh meanings when revisited with a new hindsight. An attempt to disclose precisely such meanings will be advanced below.

3.

Before engaging with the project of re-infusing a democratic cast to local liberalism and infusing it with welfarist ideals, Drăghicescu got immersed, at the time of the First World War and the peace settlement, in the politics of nation building, taking an active part as a diplomat in the creation of Greater Romania.⁶⁹ At the beginning of the twentieth century, his nationalist vision was formulated in the language of historical social psychology, in the best known of his books (and the only one that exercised a significant influence on Romanian culture over the long run, up to the present).⁷⁰ The work is a belated restatement of the variety of nationalist thinking sustained by an unqualified drive to westernization that so much characterized late Enlightenment and early nineteenth century liberal discourse all throughout Eastern Europe.⁷¹ In the same way as his predecessors of the 1848 period in Romania and the surrounding countries of the region – for which Russian Decembrists acted as paradigmatic anticipators⁷² –, Drăghicescu pleads the cause of modernization on the western pattern with a determination that is only matched by his eagerness to disclose old virtues – deeply inscribed in the local cultural texture – likely to act as an engine for catching up with the advanced nations. It is this that sets him apart from contemporaries with a related ideological orientation, but inclined to

⁶⁶ D. Drăghicescu, *Liberalismul și economia dirijată*, in “Libertatea,” 2, 5–20 July 1934, nos. 13–14, pp. 193–194.

⁶⁷ Idem, *Le problème du déterminisme social: déterminisme biologique et déterminisme social*, Paris, 1903; idem, *Du rôle de l'individu dans le déterminisme social*, Paris, 1904. See also Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology*, Ithaca, 1994 [1982], pp. 18–32.

⁶⁸ G. Strat, *Răspuns domnului D. Drăghicescu sau despre ‘pseudo-liberalismul român’*, in “Libertatea,” 2, 5 November 1934, no. 21, pp. 325–328.

⁶⁹ D. Drăghicescu, *Les problèmes nationaux de l'Autriche-Hongrie. Les Roumains (Transylvanie, Bucovine, Banat)*, Paris, 1918.

⁷⁰ Idem, *Din psihologia poporului român*, ed. by Elisabeta Simion, Bucharest, 1995 [1907].

⁷¹ Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man, 1670–1752*, Oxford, 2006, pp. 295–325; *Liberty and the Search for Identity. Liberal Nationalisms and the Legacy of Empires*, ed. by Iván Zoltán Dénes, Budapest, 2006, pp. 399–456.

⁷² A. Walicki, *Russian Social Thought*, pp. 3–6.

explain modernization as resting almost entirely on cultural imports taken against a quasi-amorphous traditional social and cultural background.⁷³

Sometimes conjoined with Romantic-conservative⁷⁴ or with socialist⁷⁵ stances, westernizer nationalism has acted as one of the most clearly cut features of modernizing liberalism in non-western – and particularly East-European – contexts.⁷⁶ It does not follow from this, however, that it could not take slightly different forms within the various (sub-)streams of the ideological trends of the kind. The Romanian record here surveyed provides good testimonies to this extent. While Drăghicescu argues his case for westernization by (seemingly) ignoring the traditionalist culture in the course of being shaped at the time in the country, Zeletin starts his journey as a political writer precisely by confronting the stark reality of a Romanian westernizer-traditionalist divide. His pamphlet entitled *From the Land of the Donkeys* of 1916 looks like an exercise in critical distancing from both camps (maybe animated by a harsher attitude towards the latter).⁷⁷ After a short and dubious flirtation with precisely that kind of traditionalist culture,⁷⁸ he then moves on to adopt his characteristic stance of giving an unqualified support to that brand of nationalist discourse which was meant to support nation-building policies – on the basis of economic protectionism yet fully within the framework of the expanding world capitalism – while at the same time rejecting wholeheartedly anti-modern nationalism of Romantic progeny, predicated on agrarian nostalgias and on an organic understanding of the national culture.⁷⁹ His interventions in “Dreptatea socială” give voice to the same argumentation.⁸⁰

Although the National Liberal Party had always subscribed only reluctantly to the (somewhat too cynical) Zeletinian rationalization of its policies⁸¹ – and some of his dissident leaders even contributed occasionally to “Libertatea” in order to

⁷³ A.D. Xenopol, *Influența franceză în România* [1887], in *Națiunea română*, ed. by Constantin Schifirneț, Bucharest, 1999, pp. 313–323; Pompiliu Eliade, *Influența franceză asupra spiritului public în România*, ed. by Aurelia Dumitrașcu, Bucharest, 2000 [1898].

⁷⁴ Dale E. Peterson, *Civilizing the Race: Chaadaev and the Paradoxes of Eurocentric Nationalism*, in “Russian Review,” 56, 1997, no. 4, pp. 550–563.

⁷⁵ Andrzej Walicki, *Rosa Luxemburg and the Question of Nationalism in Polish Marxism*, in “The Slavonic and East European Review,” 61, 1983, no. 4, pp. 565–582.

⁷⁶ Leonard Schapiro, *Rationalism and Nationalism in Russian Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, New Haven, 1967; Daniel Chirot, *Ideology, Reality and Competing Models of Development in Eastern Europe between the Two World Wars*, in “East European Politics and Societies,” 3, 1989, no. 3, pp. 378–411.

⁷⁷ Ștefan Zeletin, *Din țara măgarilor. Însemnări*, Bucharest, 1916.

⁷⁸ Idem, *Naționalism și țărănism*, in “Convorbiri literare,” 52, 1920, no. 12, pp. 769–774.

⁷⁹ Idem, *Romantismul german și cultura critică română* [1929], in *Neoliberalismul*, ed. by C.D. Zeletin, pp. 55–72.

⁸⁰ Idem, *Naționalismul. Un nume pentru două atitudini opuse față de evoluția socială*, in “Dreptatea socială,” 1, October 1923, nos. 18–19, pp. 420–427.

⁸¹ Mircea Mușat, Ion Ardeleanu, *România după Marea Unire*, vol. 2, 1933–1940, Bucharest, 1988, pp. 108–147.

argue for a half-way departure from the same policies and from their ideological reinforcements⁸² –, the discourse of Zeletin could obtain a significant following in the late 1930's.⁸³ Of still much greater influence was, however, its corporatist progeny, revolving around the figure of Mihail Manoilescu. Disentangled from the same “neoliberal” stance of the early 1920's that was defended by Zeletin⁸⁴ – and sustained, at the time, by much the same kind of opposition to the peasantist left-wing ideology and democratic rhetoric⁸⁵ –, the corporatist doctrine came back full circle to its original inspiration in the 1940's – after a long-term involvement with Carolism and a protracted relation with local fascism – by the means of an attempt to entrench itself in Romanian history taken as an exercise in historical sociology betraying its indebtedness (however critically) to Zeletinian thinking.⁸⁶ It is significant that, no matter how much it tried to enlist on its side the traditionalist nationalist and legionary-fascist rhetoric of the “organic state,”⁸⁷ the discourse of Manoilescu never fully relapsed into a celebration of anti-western and nativist values⁸⁸ in the same way as fascist social-political and economic thinking.⁸⁹ This is certainly telling of the inner nature of its liberal modernizer ideological core.

Unlike the democratic liberalism of Drăghicescu – claiming on its behalf the legacy of 1848 but hardly aware of the already strong heritage of anti-“fortyeightism” at the turn of the century –, the anticipators of “Libertatea”'s free-trade doctrine that contributed to the two series of the journal “Curentul nou” – in 1905–1906 (at Galați), and then in 1920 (at Bucharest, where the other two periodicals surveyed here were also issued) – initially defined themselves precisely by opposition to the growing culture of indigenist nationalism.⁹⁰ Unlike the supporters of Zeletin and their corporatist descendants, however, they extended this opposition towards the modernizing nationalism employed by the Romanian ruling oligarchy – and the Liberal Party leadership specifically – for legitimating policies

⁸² Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Liberalism și democrație, I*, in “Libertatea,” 3, 5 March 1935, no. 5, pp. 65–68; idem, *Liberalism și democrație, II*, in “Libertatea,” 3, 20 March 1935, no. 6, pp. 81–84.

⁸³ Mihai Plătăreanu, *Politica economică și socială a României în trecut și în cadrul legislației actuale*, Bucharest, [1935]; Victor Jinga, *Prefaceri și orientări ale burgheziei române*, Cluj, 1938.

⁸⁴ Șt. Zeletin, *Neoliberalismul*; Mihail Manoilescu, *Neoliberalismul*, in *Doctrinile partidelor politice*, ed. by P. Dan, pp. 198–228.

⁸⁵ M. Manoilescu, *Țărănism și democrație*, Bucharest, 1922; Ștefan Zeletin, *Țărănism și marxism*, in “Arhiva pentru știință și reformă socială,” 5, 1924, nos. 1–2, pp. 192–220.

⁸⁶ Șt. Zeletin, *Burghezia română*; Mihail Manoilescu, *Rostul și destinul burgheziei românești*, ed. by Leonard Oprea, Bucharest, 1997 [1942].

⁸⁷ Mihail Manoilescu, *Eminescu economist*, Bucharest, 1935, p. 9.

⁸⁸ Philippe C. Schmitter, *Reflections on Mihail Manoilescu and the Political Consequences of Delayed-Dependent Development on the Periphery of Western Europe*, in *Social Change in Romania*, ed. by K. Jowitt, Berkeley, 1978, pp. 117–139.

⁸⁹ Compare Traian Brăileanu, *Sociologia și arta guvernării. Articole politice*, 2nd ed., Bucharest, 1940; Ion Veverca, *Naționalism economic*, Bucharest, [1941].

⁹⁰ H. Sanielevici, *Falimentul poporanismului*, in “Curentul nou,” n.s., 1, 22 February 1920, no. 4, pp. 49–53. See also idem, *Poporanismul reacționar*, Bucharest, 1921.

of economic growth “by ourselves alone.” When recalling, in 1920, his 1905–1906 venture (and broadening his criticism of “populist” traditionalism such as to cover – misleadingly in the main –, alongside the right-wing brand originally targeted, the left-wing version issued from the agrarian populism of Russian revolutionary inspiration⁹¹), H. Sanielevici thus underscores that “[early twentieth century] populism was nothing more but a complot of our neo-feudal and protectionist-driven oligarchy against the industrialization of the country, that is against the independent bourgeoisie,” in order to make clear afterwards: “It was in the name of this bourgeoisie that my protests were voiced at the time.”⁹²

Leaving aside the early and rapidly classicized formulations of protectionist economic thinking,⁹³ anticipations of the “neoliberal”-corporatist trend had already been put forward at the moment the rejuvenated “Curentul nou” was clarifying its stance,⁹⁴ and influences of this way of thinking did pervade the pages of the journal. Arguing for “neoliberalism,” a collaborator thus starts by distinguishing between two extreme theoretical positions taken with respect to economic policies: “A first extremist stance is that of individualism, with its two faces, namely orthodox liberalism and anarchism. [...] Another extremist view is that of statist interventionism, with its two incarnations: imperialism and socialism.” After thus clearing the ground of erroneous creeds, the author introduces his own vision of an individualist-statist synthesis, that he presents as a (loosely defined) version of “solidarism”⁹⁵: “In between these two extremes, we find the eclectic one: solidarism proclaims the right of the individual to the full exercise of his freedoms, while nevertheless maintaining that the community can only gain from the free expression of personal interests and from the broad development of individual energies. Having said this, it is important to underscore that the individual takes birth as a debtor to society. Hence, state intervention is necessary each time individual activity is ineffective, or stays at odds with the principle of solidarity.”⁹⁶ Against the theoretical basis delineated in this way, a directive for Romanian politics is set: “The new regime will be based on cooperation. [...] As far as the state is concerned, it will act, most often, as the most important partner in the cooperative pursuits, having to encourage [...] the various forms that cooperation might take.”⁹⁷

⁹¹ Compare Valeriu Ciobanu, *Poporanismul: geneză, evoluție, ideologie*, Bucharest, 1946; Z. Ornea, *Poporanismul*, Bucharest, 1972.

⁹² H. Sanielevici, *Ce-a însemnat “Curentul nou” de la 1906*, in “Curentul nou,” n.s., 1, 1 February 1920, no. 1, p. 6.

⁹³ P.S. Aurelian, *Elemente de economie politică*, Bucharest, 1889; A.D. Xenopol, *Opere economice*, ed. by Ion Veverca, Bucharest, 1967.

⁹⁴ I.N. Angelescu, *Cooperația și socialismul în Europa*, Bucharest, 1913.

⁹⁵ See in connection with this idem, *Solidarismul social-economic*, in *Doctrinile partidelor politice*, ed. by P. Dan, pp. 279–300.

⁹⁶ N.N. Tiron, *Neoliberalism*, in “Curentul nou,” n.s., 1, 27 June 1920, no. 22, p. 339.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 441.

Such a voice sounds, however, as a strikingly isolated one in the pages of “Curentul nou.” All throughout, the journal is dedicated to promoting the emancipation of free trade economic mechanisms from the constraints of interventionism, also making a sustained pleading for foreign capitals as a necessary cure to statist-based social inertia.⁹⁸ The Romanian deviation from the developmental path of genuine liberalism is most often found as predicated on entrenched bureaucratization.⁹⁹ Ștefan Antim takes a slight departure from this interpretation, by his theory – invoking the authority of the social-democrat Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea – that Romanian society suffers from the ills of neo-feudalism, with the National Liberal Party as the most prominent support of the syndrome.¹⁰⁰ Framing his analysis in the footsteps of Gherea – always eager to emphasize, in a characteristic Plekhanovist fashion, the urgency of capitalist development and democratization over socialist revolutionary designs¹⁰¹ –, Antim explains how the agrarian reform of 1864 that abolished feudal arrangements failed to turn into agrarian capitalism. Instead, “the new bourgeoisie that the reform of Cuza created rapidly degenerated into an agrarian class, conjoining its landholding fortunes with its control over the levers of political power. When destroying the boyardom, the new agrarians indulged in a sustained hatred for the genuine bourgeoisie.”¹⁰² The law of the inalienability of peasant lands adopted in conjunction with the agrarian reform of 1864 and acting as a pillar of the neo-feudal structures “stays in total contradiction to the very essence of liberalism.” When subscribing to these arrangements and taking advantage of them, “our liberal party erected a wide-ranging system that runs contrary to the demands of liberalism, a typical anti-liberal system.”¹⁰³

Once making thus his claim for true liberalism dependent on a pleading for genuine bourgeois-capitalist development, Antim proceeds then to argue that democratization itself – the undeniable watchword of the years immediately following the First World War – can only come after the Romanian society disentangles itself from the prevailing falsifications of liberalism and capitalism: “The emergence and consolidation of the bourgeois class is the real objective of democracy, of true democracy, which cannot arise and thrive in the narrow and

⁹⁸ H. Sanielevici, *Falimentul poporanismului*; Ștefan Antim, *Capitalurile străine și împrumuturile externe*, in “Curentul nou,” n.s., 1, 29 February 1920, no. 5, pp. 72–73.

⁹⁹ H. Sanielevici, *Falimentul poporanismului*; Al. Ciurcu, *Funcționarismul*, in “Curentul nou,” n.s., 1, 20 June 1920, no. 21, pp. 326–327.

¹⁰⁰ An argument already developed in Ștefan Antim, *Chestiunea socială în România*, Bucharest, 1908.

¹⁰¹ Michael Kitch, *Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea and Rumanian Marxism*, in “The Slavonic and East European Review,” 55, 1977, no. 1, pp. 65–89; Z. Ornea, *Opera lui C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea*, Bucharest, 1983.

¹⁰² Ștefan Antim, *Spre adevărata democrație*, in “Curentul nou,” n.s., 1, 1 February 1920, no. 1, p. 13.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

unfavorable frame of an agrarian state.” Such a development is easy to envision, as the Liberal Party will have to make appeal to bourgeois constituencies in the new conditions created by the introduction of universal male suffrage, accompanied by a redistribution of lands. Indeed, having seen their hopes of gaining the peasant electorate on their side thwarted – due to the fact that enfranchised peasants moved easily into the political folds of peasantism and nationalism –, “the liberals can only survive if they manage to adapt to the new situation, which they themselves created in fact. They will have to go to the towns, in order to find in that milieu their old supporters whom they expelled from the great agrarian holdings. We can be sure that our liberals will do this time what they should have always done: they will look for the support of the bourgeois class, of the independent and productive bourgeoisie.”¹⁰⁴

In “Curentul nou,” the pleading for classical liberalism was born in direct confrontation with the practices of mainstream modernizing liberalism, that were to receive, soon thereafter, the rationalization elaborated by Zeletin. In “Libertatea,” the theoretical defense of liberalism and individualism would greatly gain in sophistication, at the cost of dropping out expressions of explicit opposition to the liberal establishment. After joining the enterprise driven by Gigurtu and Strat, Sanielevici and Antim continued to broaden their criticism of bureaucratic parasitism,¹⁰⁵ of protectionism and economic isolationism¹⁰⁶ and of “neo-medieval” traditionalism,¹⁰⁷ while abstaining from taking explicit issue with either the party staying in power up to December 1937 under the leadership of Gheorghe Tătărescu or, indeed, with Carol II and his camarilla (that Gigurtu himself would increasingly get associated with). Even when lessening the critical edge of their theories in this way, they nevertheless continued to envision national development as professed westernizer liberals.¹⁰⁸

4.

The exchange between Drăghicescu and Strat emerges retrospectively as a Romanian fragment of a world-wide and long-term confrontation between two traditions of liberal thinking and practice. At the time he refashioned it in order to counteract the attempt at a liberal-individualist revival of the journal “Libertatea,” the social thesis expressed by Drăghicescu from within broadly conceived liberal theoretical principles was being placed on sounder foundations by the Keynesian

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁵ Idem, *Funcționarismul*, in “Libertatea,” 2, 5–20 August 1934, nos. 15–16, pp. 242–245.

¹⁰⁶ Idem, *Liberalismul*, in “Libertatea,” 3, 5 April 1935, no. 7, pp. 97–99. See also H. Sanielevici, *Agonia capitalismului*, in “Libertatea,” 1, 5 February 1933, no. 3, pp. 33–35.

¹⁰⁷ Ștefan Antim, *Spre un nou Veac de Mijloc*, in “Libertatea,” 1, 5 May 1933, no. 9, pp. 134–135.

¹⁰⁸ Compare Brian A. Porter, *The Social Nation and Its Futures: English Liberalism and Polish Nationalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Warsaw*, in “American Historical Review,” 101, 1996, no. 5, pp. 1470–1492.

revolution in economic theorizing.¹⁰⁹ New Deal policies taking inspiration from the same new economic view were already being coined, in the United States, as a response to the intrinsic instability of the capitalist system that the economic crisis had made manifest. Large-scale extensions and full-blown applications of the same policies, in Western Europe and other parts of the capitalist world, came after the end of the Second World War.¹¹⁰ Despite the fact that it acted as an integral part of the Cold War international constellation, functioning in conjunction with reconstruction strategies designed to contain global communism, the welfare state agenda drawn on the basis of a left-wing understanding of liberalism took advantage of the anti-fascist consensus and of the interwar Popular Front tradition.¹¹¹ Its demise in the late 1970's, partly under the impact of new international pressures arising from the restructuring of the same Cold War framework,¹¹² issued into a rejuvenation of precisely those deregulating economic practices that Strat and his associates envisioned in the 1930's as a necessary cure for the entrenched ills brought about by the Romanian statist-driven economy. Continuously fed by an ingrained apprehension of any liberal concession to socialist ideals and objectives, the neoliberal view – canonized as the “Washington consensus” and strengthened by the breakdown of Soviet-style communism as a major ideological alternative to capitalism on a global scale¹¹³ – then reigned supreme up until the inauguration of a new economic crisis of capitalism.¹¹⁴ Critics of neoliberal practices underscored the importance of China's refashioning of its economic-political system on the state capitalist model as an integral part of the (temporary) victory of right-wing liberalism over its rival,¹¹⁵ thus bringing to light the full relevance of older analyses of the Chinese deviation from the Russian (and East European) communist pattern, itself predicated on marked differences between centuries-long historical legacies.¹¹⁶

Alongside their bare urge for a return to welfare-state ideals, such criticisms of the three decades of neoliberal ascendancy – installed in 1979, enhanced in 1989

¹⁰⁹ Wayne Parsons, *Politics and Markets: Keynes and His Critics*, in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, ed. by T. Ball, R. Bellamy, pp. 45–69.

¹¹⁰ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000*, Oxford, 2002, pp. 229–339.

¹¹¹ Idem, *Legacies of Antifascism: Constructing Democracy in Postwar Europe*, in “New German Critique,” 67, 1996, pp. 73–100.

¹¹² Robert E. Goodin, *The End of the Welfare State?*, in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, ed. by T. Ball, R. Bellamy, pp. 202–216.

¹¹³ Fran Tonkiss, *Markets against States: Neoliberalism*, in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, ed. by Kate Nash, Alan Scott, Oxford, 2004 [2001], pp. 250–260.

¹¹⁴ *Business as Usual. The Roots of the Global Financial Meltdown*, ed. by Craig Calhoun, Georgi Derluguian, New York, 2011.

¹¹⁵ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford, 2005, pp. 120–151.

¹¹⁶ Theda Skocpol, *Old Regimes Legacies and Communist Revolutions in Russia and China*, in “Social Forces,” 55, 1976, no. 2, pp. 284–315.

and shattered in 2008 – also point to the need for reconsidering the theoretical bases of the socially-sensitive liberalism and the wider intellectual tradition staying behind it. Polanyi's view of economic "embeddedness" – already hinted at above – thus went together with Keynesian economics as a theoretical reinforcement of left-wing policies predicated on broad liberal premises (despite its emergence – and unlike Keynesianism – from within the socialist tradition¹¹⁷). The (rather eclectic) "new liberalism" of the pre-Keynesian variety to the fold of which Drăghicescu belonged was rooted in a tradition stretching back across the welter of the nineteenth century democratic radicalism with Jacobin overtones, to the republican and radical Enlightenment tradition of early modern times.¹¹⁸ Hayek's neoliberal alternative was elaborated, for sure, on neo-classical economic foundations already set at the end of the nineteenth century and refashioned by the Austrian school during the interwar era.¹¹⁹ Its economic theory and historical sociology were deeply intertwined with a revival of liberal conservative philosophical principles taking place against the background of totalitarian politics,¹²⁰ but also staying in continuity to the liberalism of the Right forged in the aftermath of the French Revolution and indebted to the vision of moderate Enlightenment.¹²¹ How can we characterize the three Romanian liberal stances delineated so far by reference to the Left-Right historical divide thus disclosed within the larger liberal tradition?

The ideological experiment of "Dreptatea socială" can firmly be placed on the side of Left-liberalism. Otherwise – and despite the fact that it can reasonably be vindicated as a Romanian contribution to the revival of classical liberal economics and liberal-conservative politics in the guise of the twentieth century neoliberalism –, the discourse promoted by Sanielevici, Antim, Strat and their associates is more difficult to be characterized as participating in the world-wide development of liberalism with a right-wing cast, when taking into account the role it performed as part of the Romanian ideological context. The collaborators of "Libertatea" took a (somewhat timid) critical stance towards the expanding culture

¹¹⁷ S.C. Humphreys, *History, Economics and Sociology: The Work of Karl Polanyi*, in "History and Theory," 8, 1969, no. 2, pp. 165–212; W. Parsons, *Politics and Markets*, pp. 46–48, 51–53.

¹¹⁸ J.I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, pp. 699–861; Gregory Claeys, Christine Lattek, *Radicalism, Republicanism and Revolutionism: From the Principles of '89 to the Origins of Modern Terrorism*, in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. by Gareth Stedman Jones, Gregory Claeys, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 200–254.

¹¹⁹ W. Parsons, *Politics and Markets*, pp. 60–65.

¹²⁰ Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Critics of Totalitarianism*, in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, ed. by T. Ball, R. Bellamy, pp. 181–201.

¹²¹ J.G.A. Pocock, *Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions: The American and French Cases in British Perspective*, in "Government and Opposition," 23, 1989, no. 1, pp. 81–106; Annelien de Dijn, *Aristocratic Liberalism in Post-Revolutionary France*, in "The Historical Journal," 48, 2005, no. 3, pp. 661–681; Lawrence Goldman, *Conservative Political Thought from the Revolutions of 1848 until the Fin de Siècle*, in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. by G. Stedman Jones, G. Claeys, pp. 691–719.

of fascism,¹²² while describing the prevailing “ideological confusion” of the age as evenly nurtured by false idols belonging to all parts of the political spectrum.¹²³ They sometimes adopted recognizable liberal-conservative overtones, harshly opposed to democratic demagoguery.¹²⁴ In a related fashion, they could argue that “the Right continues to be the Right,” while “the Left is not the Left anymore,” in so far as “it can only get embodied by following the ways of the Right.”¹²⁵ Still, when contrasted with the Zeletinian conception streamlined on a path of evolution leading to the corporatist surge for a nationalist-authoritarian breakthrough, the voices of “Curentul nou” and “Libertatea” emerge as belonging together with that of Drăghicescu – and indeed with that of the social-democratic theory acknowledged by Antim as an inspiration –, as parts of a large oppositional camp that can loosely be described as left-wing, on local criteria. The view originated with Sanielevici around 1900 has always remained a minority variety of liberalism throughout the last pre-communist decades of Romanian history. Holding an even starker minority status in the interwar period, the liberal socialism that glimmered in “Dreptatea socială” relied on the memory of fortyeighter democratic radicalism,¹²⁶ itself an oppositional discourse at the time but which had nevertheless managed to accede to a position of prominence in the sphere of culture. Acting as a perverted inheritor of fortyeightism, the peripheral variety of “neoliberalism” defended by Zeletin occupied a solid mainstream position among the Romanian interpretations of the liberal view.

The liberal heritage of Eastern Europe is almost entirely associated with the same view that received its best Romanian expression in the works of Zeletin.¹²⁷ By gradually disentangling themselves from communism, East European intellectual circles participated – in some countries of the region at least – to the cross-bordering elaboration of late twentieth-century neoliberalism.¹²⁸ However, despite the fact that warnings against the conflation of the broader liberal vision with the narrower tenets of its neoliberal version alone were occasionally expressed,¹²⁹ no sustained attempt to elaborate a historical typology of regional liberal politics and thinking has been advanced so far. The present paper was therefore intended as an effort to start filling this gap.

¹²² P. Dinopol, *Cetind Pentru legionari de dl. Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu*, in “Libertatea,” 5, 5 February 1937, no. 3, pp. 44–46; idem, *Roza vânturilor*, in “Libertatea,” 5, 5 June 1937, no. 11, pp. 200–202.

¹²³ Idem, *Haos ideologic*, in “Libertatea,” 5, 5–20 August 1937, nos. 15–16, pp. 281–283.

¹²⁴ Nicolae Steinhardt, *Socialiştii apărători ai libertăţii*, in “Libertatea,” 5, 5 May 1937, no. 9, pp. 161–163.

¹²⁵ H.H. Streiman, *Dreapta şi Stânga*, in “Libertatea,” 5, 5–20 July, nos. 13–14, 1937, p. 246.

¹²⁶ D. Drăghicescu, *Evoluţia ideilor liberale*, pp. 10–18.

¹²⁷ Jerzy Szacki, *Liberalism after Communism*, Budapest, 1995, pp. 43–72.

¹²⁸ Johanna Bockman, Gil Eyal, *Eastern Europe as a Laboratory for Economic Knowledge: The Transnational Roots of Neoliberalism*, in “The American Journal of Sociology,” 108, 2002, no. 2, pp. 310–352.

¹²⁹ J. Szacki, *Liberalism after Communism*, pp. 119–170.

THE NATION OF THE WESTERNIZERS: MAINSTREAM AND MINORITY
VARIETIES OF ROMANIAN LIBERALISM

Abstract

The article broadens a typological approach to the history of Romanian ideological development centered upon an approach of the same kind taken to the evolution of ideological liberalism in the pre-communist period. Focusing on the period 1900–1940 and on three periodicals of the time, it delineates two minority liberal discourses, alongside the mainstream one of modernizing liberalism with a strong statist and nationalist commitment, best incarnated historically in the practices of the National Liberal Party and having counterparts in all East European countries. The local typology thus disclosed is then related to the world-wide evolution of the main trends of liberalism over the long run. The study underlines that the existing comparative bibliography does not offer an appropriate understanding of the varieties of liberal theory and experience within the region. The article is intended to start filling this gap of the available literature.

Keywords: liberalism; oligarchic politics; economic interventionism; westernizer nationalism; ideological heritages; Romania